

STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER ROBERT M. McDOWELL

July 19, 2012

RE: Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau Efforts to Analyze 9-1-1 Outages in Wake of June 29, 2012 *Derecho* Storm

I am pleased that the Chairman has asked the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau to undertake an effort to analyze the communications issues that arose in connection with the June 29 *derecho*. We are gathering information through many avenues, including yesterday's public notice. I also want to acknowledge and thank the communications companies and public safety officials that have been working with the Bureau in connection with this examination. The past few weeks have no doubt been a trying time and we are grateful for your assistance; but, it has been especially trying for tens of thousands of our fellow citizens.

The scope of and damage caused by the *derecho* was simply overwhelming. Most alarmingly, press accounts tell us that upwards of 2.5 million people in the greater Washington, DC area were without access to 9-1-1 services during a significant natural disaster. The exact cause or causes of these outages remain a mystery and that is unacceptable. We must do all that we can to ensure such a wide-scale outage never happens again. Not only must we be prepared for unforeseen natural phenomena, but being the capital of the United States, we must be prepared for potential terrorist attacks as well. Having hardened and reliable 9-1-1 systems is crucial to the public interest.

Hopefully the events surrounding the *derecho* can serve as a wake-up call for government and industry alike. The storm, or storms, were incredibly powerful and destructive, but the silver lining is that they may have exposed fundamental weaknesses in our public safety systems that we now can start strengthening.

As we now know, the Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax County areas of northern Virginia were particularly hard-hit. At one point, Verizon reported that its field forces were responding to 130 downed utility poles and 762 downed copper or fiber cables in the region. Their technicians and countless others were working round-the-clock to restore critical services.

Although it may be impossible to fully prepare for and anticipate any event that may occur in the future, it is important for government and the private sector to make the time to study what went wrong, what went right and to assemble lessons learned. By doing so, we can and will help make the public safer and better-prepared for the next event. I look forward to working with all interested stakeholders to learn more and to assist with next steps.